

The RashiYomi NewsLetter

The 10 RashiYomi Rules, Vol 31#23, August 22nd, 2019

Their Presence in this Week's Parshah, Re'eH

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This issue is devoted to two questions. We encourage questions on any Rashi (doesn't have to be on current Parshah). These questions deal with Meaning.

Therefore, please feel free to send questions on Rashi to RashiYomi@GMail.Com

Hi

I was wondering if you could please refresh my memory as to where it is that Rashi tells us something like that every time the word HaMakom is used it refers to the place of the Kodesh HaKodashim?

And in general terms, as someone rather literal, what should I do when I am given what seem to be universal rules without exception such as "every" time? I tend to get hung up on these things.

Thank you for any advice.

Chaim

I: First we do Rashi

This is a Rashi on **Gn28-11a**. The biblical text states as follows

Jacob left Beer Sheva, he journeyed towards Charan. He bumped into *the place*; he stayed there overnight because the sun was setting; he took stones and placed them near his head [for shelter]; he slept in *that place*.

Notice the use of articles and prepositional phrases

- He bumped into *the place* versus he bumped into *a place*
- He slept in *that place* vs. he slept *there*

What can we infer: That this was a known place which is why *the* is used versus *a*. Rashi states:

[Although it says in *the place*] it doesn't say in which place

But we don't know which place. Very important in understanding this Rashi is in understanding what happened that night. If we read the biblical text further, it says

He dreamed: There was a ladder standing earthward with its head reaching towards heaven.

Behold: Angels of God went up and down on it

Behold: God was standing by him....

Most of the Rashi commentators focus on the *the-a* distinction. Rashi does mention this and it is important. It tells us *something* is pointed to but doesn't tell us what. For Rashi to pick a place out of thin air would be arbitrary. To properly understand the Rashi we must find out what happened there. What happened there is a dream, a vision, a communication from God, prophecy itself. Now, and only now, can we understand the rest of Rashi.

This must be *the place* mentioned elsewhere, Mount Moriah where Abraham offered Isaac as it says *And he [Abraham] saw the place in the distance*.

Rashi is not playing a game *place-place* with biblical verses. Rather, Rashi is observing

- *The place* where Jacob bumped into was capable of producing prophecies
- *The place* where Abraham offered Isaac also was a place of prophecies.

Rashi connects them because of the prophetic capability of the place. I think this the proper approach to Rashi.

Of course, as we all know, tradition informs us that Mount Moriah was where the Temple built by the Jews was situated, and also the place where Adam offered offerings. We need not get into that. Rashi is solid.

Also note: Rashi said nothing about the Temple. He simply said that a particular place had powerful emotional connotations, powerful enough to produce vivid dreams, even prophecy.

II: Second We Go to the RadaQ

A very good rule of thumb when studying meaning in Rashi is to see the Radaq's take on these words in his magnum opus, his famous dictionary, *Shoroshim*.

Our sages [Genesis Rabbah, 68] coined the name of God as *place* because *He is the place of the world, but the world is not his place*

Radaq also did not believe in playing games. He in fact brings two verses to support this approach

Dt34-27 The First God, is the *Lair* [of the world] [therefore] the armed nations are beneath Him

Esther 4:12-13 [Mordechai instructed Esther to appear before the King Achashverosh to save the Jewish people which however carried a risk of death] Don't imagine saving yourself while the Jews aren't. If you are silent now, respite and tranquility will come from *another place* and you and your father's house will die...

Radaq takes *Lair* as the name of God. He takes *another place* [instead of elsewhere] as an inuendo to *Place* [God]. Radaq explains that God's name is not mentioned in the Megillah because it was included with the profane Persian libraries.

III: Metonymy

So, God's name might be *Place*. But why? Radaq (not Rashi) cites the approach of the Midrash *He is the world's place, but the world is not his place*. But that is silly, a rhyme, perhaps something to tell children, without good foundation. What is the real reason?

We therefore invoke the *metonymy* Figure of Speech principle. Here we use the **Rashi Meaning-Figure of Speech method**. Metonymy is a well-established method in all languages.

What does metonymy mean? It means that something can refer to something else associated with it. For example, if we say that *America entered the war in response to the Pearl Harbor attack*, we are really saying that *The people living in America, Americans, entered the war*. Think about it. *America* itself refers to a place. Places don't fight; rather the people residing there fight. But metonymy says it is OK to confuse the *place* and *its inhabitants*. That is, metonymy insists that *America* can take on a new meaning, *Americans*, because *America* is uniquely associated with the *Americans*.

There are many other examples of metonymy. But this is all we need for now. Using the very same principle, the word *Temple* can refer to *God*. So, in fact, God is called *The Holy One*, just as the Temple is called the *Holy Place* (Mikdash). In a similar manner, pilgrims going to Jerusalem would speak about *going to the place* to offer the festive offerings in which the family partook. So, *The Place* refers to the Temple and hence it can also refer to Him who resides there, God.

What then do I with the nice children's rhyme: *God is the place of the world, but the world is not his place*. There are two approaches. We can say (as we have said often) that the Midrash clothed the real reason in the form of fancy rhyme to help people remember, but the real

reason is the abstract principle of metonymy. A second approach is that this children's rhyme points to God's omnipresence, He is everywhere, in all places. But that is exactly the idea that God resides in the Temple amongst the Jewish people even if they are sinful This omnipresence theme is an exact quote from Rashis on **Nu35-34a,b**.

IV Further Proof

Ezekiel 3:12 containing the chariot vision of Ezekiel concludes with the praise given to God in Heaven: *Blessed is God from His Place*. Here, *Place* could easily refer to the Temple. Ezekiel was a priest and that is the way he thought. Again, *His Place* referring to the Temple by metonymy refers to *God Himself*, the same way *America* refers to *Americans*.

V: Where to Apply This Meaning

Chaim asks where this principle should be applied. *Radaq* gives some examples and we refer you to the Table above. Basically, it is like any word with multiple meanings. A determination of which meaning applies comes from an examination of context.

VI: Next Question

Rashi at Gn03-13a discussing Eve's response to God who asked why she sinned, *The snake misled me, and I ate [from the tree]* explains

The Hebrew root involved means *to err* as in 2C32-15 discussing the attack on Jerusalem by Assyria. The military leader addressed the Jews *Don't be misled by [your king] Chizkiyahu who promises you safety from me*.

Here is the question I was asked.

Hi. Can you please help me understand the Rashi on this? He's making a grammatical comparison, but I can't see the verb root similarity. Seems to me like this word is unique Thanks.

I had difficulty getting this to line up with concordance... BDB

VII: Radaq to the rescue again

Under the root **Nun-Shin-Aleph** which Radaq explains means to *seduce and persuade*, Radaq lists the two verses cited by Rashi. Radaq brings many more examples.

Let us summarize Rashi and Radaq's translation of **Gn03-13**

Rashi: The snake made me <i>err</i> and I ate
Radaq: The snake <i>persuaded</i> me, and I ate
Radaq (alternate): The snake misled me, and I ate

Here already we begin to see the problem and the solution. The general category, the hypernym of *error* includes many particular categories, hyponyms, such as *persuade*, *misled*, *seduce*. We recognize the general idea but not the particular nuance.

So, while we understand the *general* meaning of **Gn03-13** we don't know which English word captures its nuances.

Questions like this need not have complete answers. We are trying to capture in English the nuances of a Hebrew word. There may be no comparable English word. We have the three hypernyms given by Rashi/Radaq: *err*, *seduce*, *persuade/misled*.

VIII: My Approach

First some statistics. There are 1900 Biblical roots. Of these 1900 biblical roots about 40% are what we might call 2-letter roots, that is a three-letter root one of whose letters is a weak letter such as **aleph**, **hey**, **nun**, etc. Among these 2 letter roots, in about 80% of the cases, there is a clear relationship between the different three letter versions of the two letter roots.

Using this statistic, we can state a hypothesis of mine:

- Rashi *fully* believed in the trilateral root

for purposes of conjugation

- But for purposes of meaning Rashi believed in two-letter roots.

I take note, that the famous modern grammarian, Gesenius, explicitly advocates this meaning approach to two-letter roots as a tool

So, we go to the root **Nun-Shin-Hey** (which differs from the root **Nun-Shin-Aleph**). Without going into great detail, we point out that when Jacob wrestled with the angel his sinew tendon was *dislocated*; we call this the *displaced* sinew (*Gid Hansheh*).

I would like to suggest the word *slipped* instead of *dislocated* or *displaced*. The tendon *slipped* out of its place.

Using this I would like to explain **Nun-Shin-Aleph** as getting a person to make a *slip of the tongue*. So, Eve was saying *We were talking, and the snake caused me to make a slip and then I decided to give in and eat*. Similar interpretations can be given to other occurrences of **Nun-Shin-Aleph**. For example, the Assyrian military leader might be saying, *Don't listen to your King's promises till you accidentally slip and say you will be saved*

Is this correct? As pointed out in the last section, it is an attempt to capture nuances. The reader must look at the hypernyms available: *err, slip, seduce, persuade, misled* to ascertain which one fits the verse better.

I simply wanted to show tools by which translations like this are approached.

Finally, I point out that the person who asked pointed out that modern dictionaries (such as the BDB) did not help. Very often on rare verb conjugations there will be disagreement on the underlying root since competing roots with weak letters may have the same conjugation in different tenses.

The exercise I pointed out here of seeing Rashi and Radaq not as involved in controversy but as

involved in attempts at nuance capture along with my more fanciful attempt at nuance capture are typical exercises that help us search for the precise nuance. As long as the search is seen this way it represents legitimate activity.

APPENDIX

THE 10 RASHI RULE CATEGORIES

A Lightning Summary with Examples

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Rule I-REFERENCE: EXAMPLE: Dt26-05d *We went down to Egypt with a few people* explained by Gn46-27: with 70 people

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Rule II-MEANING / Lexicography / Dictionary:
EXAMPLE (Connectives) KI means IF,PERHAPS,RATHER,BECAUSE,WHEN,THAT (Rashi on Gn18-15a Gn24-33a) **EXAMPLE (Nuances):** YDA means FAMILIAR, not KNOW (e.g. Dt34-10a) egg Gn04-01 Adam was FAMILIAR with his wife **EXAMPLE (Idioms)** ON THE FACE OF means DURING THE LIFETIME (Rashi on Nu03-04a Gn11-28a Ex20-03c Dt05-07a) **EXAMPLE (Synonyms)** *Marchese* means pot; *Machinate* means frying pan (Lv02-05a, 07a) **EXAMPLE (Homonyms)** SHAMAH can mean listen, hear, understand: (Gn42-23a) *They didn't appreciate that Joseph understood them* (Note: They knew he was listening) **EXAMPLE (Metonymy)** (Lv02-11a) *Don't offer ...any honey as offerings* RASHI: *honey* includes any sweet fruit juice

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Rule III-GRAMMAR: EXAMPLE: BA-ah means COMING not CAME(Gn46-26a)

EXAMPLE: A grammatical conjugation in the Hitpael if 1st root letter is Tzade (Gn44-16a)

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Rule IV-PARALLELISM: EXAMPLE: (Ex20-04) Don't **POSSESS** the gods of others Don't **MAKE** idols RASHI: So both **POSSESS**ion & **MAKING** of idols are prohibited

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Rule V-CONTRADICTION: EXAMPLE: (Nu04-03, Nu08-24a) Levites start Temple work at 25; Levites start temple work at 30. RASHI: They apprentice at 25 but start actual service at 30.

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Rule VI-STYLE: RABBI ISHMAEL RULES: EXAMPLE: (Simple verses should be generalized): (Rashi Pesachim 6) (Dt25-04a) *Don't MUZZLE an OX while THRESHING* RASHI: Don't STOP any WORKING ANIMAL from eating

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Rule VII-FORMATTING: EXAMPLE (*BOLD indicated by Repetition*): Ex12-09c) **COOK** it in water (So **COOKED-COOKED** is understood the same way bold is understood by modern reader) RASHI: Preferred to **COOK** it in water; But **COOK** it at all costs (Even if you don't have water) **EXAMPLE:** (*BULLETS indicated by Repeating keywords*) (Ex03-11a) Who am I - **THAT** I should go to Pharaoh - **THAT** I should take the Jews out of Egypt RASHI: Repeated word **THAT** creates BULLET effect - Pharaoh was a difficult king (Bullet one) - Jews were not yet ready for freedom (Bullet two) **EXAMPLE** (*Climax assumed in any Biblical list*): (Dt19-11a) *If a man HATES, SPIES, CONFRONTS & KILLS.* RASHI: Bible identifies 4 stages to murder (indicated by capped words)

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Rule VIII-DATABASE: EXAMPLE: *God spoke to Moses to say over* introduces about 7 dozen biblical commandments; *God spoke to Aaron to say over* only introduces 2 commandments. RASHI: (Lv10-03b) Aaron was silent when his sons died because they served in the Temple drunk; hence he merited that the commandment prohibiting priests to work in the Temple drunk, was given to him

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Rule IX-NON VERSE: EXAMPLE: (Use of Algebra)(Ex38-26b) *Temple donations of silver were 100 Kikar and 1775 Shekel from 630,550 half-shekels* RASHI: So one Kikar of silver = 3000 Shekel.

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Rule X: SYMBOLISM: EXAMPLE: (Use of puns) Moses made a copper snake for people to look up to when bitten by snakes (so they should pray and recover) RASHI: (Nu21-09a) The Hebrew root for copper and snake are identical (Cf. The English *copperhead*) Moses made the metal snake copper colored to symbolize the snake